Mail-in Rebate

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Mail-in Rebate

by Bordementions

Summary

Delivering an item from one place to another, is that really a service? Hell, you wouldn't catch me dead paying for something like that.

Notes

Me when I write self indulgent arknights angst filled to the brim with my headcanons cause I'm a stupid loser

See the end of the work for more notes

Scorched earth.

That was the only word that really came to mind if you tried to think about what you were seeing all around you.

Smoke hung over the battlefield like a second sky, broken bodies sprawled across the ruins, friend and foe indistinguishable in death.

You hadn't been meant to be here. She had told you—warned you multiple times, with that lopsided smile of hers and a lazy wave of her hand—that you were out of your depth. "You're a sweet one, but this isn't your scene," she had said.

You came anyway.

And now, pinned beneath a collapsed section of wall, you were paying for it.

The rebar had skewered you clean through the side, punched deep into your flesh with horrifying precision. You could feel it, even through the numbing shock setting into your body: the sickening heat around the wound, the wet squelch of blood soaking your clothes, the cold bite of exposed metal scraping inside you when you shifted even a little. Blood pooled beneath you, warm at first, then chilling rapidly as it seeped into the broken concrete.

Every breath rattled, shallow and desperate.

"...Help... anyone..." you called out, your voice barely a whisper against the moaning wind and distant crackle of dying fires.

No answer.

It would’ve been easy to give up right there. Maybe you should have. But even now, you clung stubbornly to the foolish hope that someone —anyone—would come.

The world blurred at the edges. You weren't sure how long you lay there before you heard the sound of footsteps crunching over debris, lazy and unhurried.

And then you saw her—Mostima, sauntering through the wreckage like this was just another stroll through the markets of Lungmen.

She caught sight of you, her expression slipping into a crooked smile, like you were nothing more than a friend who’d taken a nasty tumble.

"Whoa, rough spot you got yourself into, huh?" she said lightly, voice as casual as ever. She crouched down beside you, her coat dusted with ash and specks of blood, the faint gleam of her horns catching the light.

"Mosti..." you rasped, managing a weak smile of your own. Your hand, slick with blood, twitched toward her before falling limply to the rubble.

"Hey, easy now. You're not clocking out just yet." She winked, brushing some debris away from your face with surprising gentleness. "What happened to taking it easy, huh? You're supposed to leave the dramatic battlefield heroics to the professionals."

You coughed wetly, the taste of iron flooding your mouth. "S-sorry... you said not to... but... I thought... maybe I could help..."

Mostima let out a soft, breathy laugh. It wasn't mocking—just warm, tired, and unbearably kind.

"Come on. Don't start apologizing now. I'm the one who should be saying sorry... letting things get this messy."

Her hand moved some rubble carefully away from your torso. You saw it then—how her easy smile faltered for a fraction of a second when her eyes traced the twisted steel jammed through you. She recovered fast, giving you a low whistle like she was impressed.

"Yeesh. That's... a bit worse than I thought. But don't worry. You're tough. You're gonna be just fine, alright? Promise."

You believed her. God help you, you wanted to believe her. You latched onto her lie like a drowning man to driftwood.

"Okay..." you breathed.

Mostima tugged her coat off and pressed it around the base of the wound, trying—hopelessly—to slow the bleeding. The moment she applied pressure though, a fresh gout of blood welled up, staining her hands dark red. Your whole body spasmed with the pain, a choked cry escaping your throat.

"Shh, shh, hey. You're doing great," she murmured, voice soft. "I've seen worse. Hell, I've been worse. Just hang tight a little longer, alright? We'll have you back at Rhodes before you know it. Patch you right up, good as new."

Your fingers scrabbled weakly at the rubble, at her sleeve. You were cold now, despite the searing pain, the world narrowing to the glowing blue of her eyes, the ghost of her grin.

"Did... did we win?" you asked, voice thready and cracking.

Mostima chuckled under her breath, that same old musical sound she always had.

"Of course we did. You kidding? With me on the field? Please." She gave you a little wink. "We're even ahead of schedule. Thinking about what snack we should celebrate with once you're up and kicking."

You smiled faintly, the expression barely moving your blood-smeared lips.

"Want... cake," you mumbled, half-delirious.

"Heh. Deal. Tea cakes and a tall story. I'll even throw in some of the good ones—the ones I save for special occasions."

You closed your eyes for a second, feeling strangely weightless, like you were floating above your broken body.

Mostima's hand squeezed yours gently. Her fingers were slick with your blood, but she didn't seem to mind.

"You're holding up pretty well, y'know," she said with a soft smile. "Considering you've got half a construction site trying to make a new home inside your ribs."

You managed a faint laugh. It hurt. God, it hurt. Each breath was like dragging razors through your lungs. You were acutely aware of the rebar still impaled through you—the way it twisted your torso at an awkward angle, the deep, wet squelch of torn muscle and organ with every twitch, and the unnatural warmth pooling beneath your back as your blood kept leaking out, slow and steady.

"Mosti... don't joke," you murmured, voice trembling. "This is... pretty bad."

"Hey, hey," she replied, tilting her head playfully. "What'd I say earlier? I've seen worse. You're not out of the game just yet."

But she wasn't laughing anymore.

Her eyes lingered on the exposed metal skewering your abdomen, the

jagged way it had entered—not clean, no, this had punched through with vicious force and torn flesh on the way out. Around the wound, your skin had gone pale and waxy, ringed with angry red. Blood still welled from both the entry and exit points, flowing over your side in thick, dark rivulets, pooling under your hip.

You could feel the warmth draining out of you. Even now, even with her close, your fingers felt cold. Numb.

"I'm gonna pull it out," she said suddenly, voice still soft—like she was telling you she was going to get you coffee, not rip steel out of your guts.

Your breath hitched. "Wh... what?"

Mostima met your eyes, that same tired calm in her expression, her smile gentle and unwavering.

"It's okay. I've got you. We can't get you out of here unless we move it, and you're bleeding anyway. Might as well get it over with, yeah?"

You shook your head, panic rising. "No, wait—Mosti, that's not—if you take it out it'll—"

"Shh." Her finger pressed lightly to your lips. "I know. I know it's scary. But you trust me, right?"

You stared up at her, vision blurring with tears and shock. Her face—always so infuriatingly relaxed, so untouchable.

"...Yeah. I trust you."

She gave a little wink. "Then be brave for me, just a bit longer."

Mostima shifted, pushing her coat aside as she crouched lower. Her hand moved to the rebar, blood-slick fingers wrapping around it. You could feel the pressure building already, like something deep inside you was about to scream.

"Okay," she said, mostly to herself. "Nice and slow... just like threading a needle."

And then she pulled.

The scream that tore from your throat didn't sound human. You felt it rip through you, the rebar dragging flesh, splitting already shredded muscle wider apart. Something inside tore—something vital. The pain

was white-hot, infinite. You arched against the rubble instinctively and felt your body convulse violently.

Blood gushed from the wound—not a trickle, but a surge. It poured over your side in a bubbling crimson stream, frothing and pulsing in rhythm with your failing heartbeat. The cavity left behind felt hollow, as if your insides had turned to jelly.

You choked. You couldn't breathe. Blood flooded up into your throat, thick and Pungent. You coughed hard, each time spraying dark red over your chin, your chest, Mostima's hands.

"Shit—!" she cursed under her breath, catching your shoulders, pressing her hand hard to your side.

You whimpered through clenched teeth, trying to stay still, trying not to thrash as another jolt of agony screamed up your spine.

Mostima was still smiling, but her eyes—they betrayed everything.

"You're okay. You're okay, hey," she said quickly, voice hushed and coaxing. "I know that hurt like hell, but it's over now. You did so good. Just stay awake for me, okay? Eyes on me. Right here."

Your lips moved, no words, just a shuddering breath and more blood. It dribbled down your chin and over her fingers.

Mostima reached into her bag, one-handed, rifling through it quickly. Her hand came out with gauze, bandages—useless, all of it—and something else.

A small trinket. Dull brass with faint etchings, a tiny carving of a sky-faring bird. Something handmade. Weather-worn.

"I got this for you," she said, showing it to you like you weren't currently dying in her arms. "Found it in a market way up in Bolivar. Pretty right?"

You smiled weakly, blood-streaked. "...Thought... I was the one... who wasn't s'posed to travel."

"Hm. Technicalities."

You looked at the charm, focusing on it to avoid the pain screaming through your gut.

Then your voice dropped, small and trembling.

"...Am I going to die, Mosti?"

Mostima blinked. Her smile didn't waver, but the silence stretched for a heartbeat too long.

Then, quietly: "Yeah."

You stared at her, not really knowing what to respond with.

"There's no real way we can get you out in time," she said, no longer pretending. "Too much damage. I'm sorry. If I could carry you, I would. If I could rewind time and stop you from coming here, I would. But, it's looking like this is it."

You felt your breath hitch, more tears rising. "I don't... I don't want to die."

"I know," she whispered, brushing blood-matted hair from your forehead. "I know. I'm here."

Her hand found yours, fingers intertwining with your slick, trembling ones. She held tight, her other palm still pressed against your bleeding side as if it could stop the inevitable.

"You're not alone. I've got you. You're with me."

Your lips moved again — not words, just the sound of someone trying not to sob through a mouth full of blood.

Mostima leaned down, her forehead touching yours, horns just barely grazing the rubble around you.

"You were always brave. Even when you shouldn't have been. Even when I told you not to be. I always liked that about you."

The pain dulled now—not gone, but distant. Everything was fading. The warmth of her hand. The sound of her voice.

But time dragged on in fragments—half-lucid moments broken by pain, broken by fading warmth. For how long you weren't sure, but you weren't ready, who could be?

Mostima stayed crouched beside you for a long time after pulling the rebar, never letting go of your hand even as your blood turned thick and sluggish, your grip all but faded. You couldn't really feel much anymore—not your legs, not your side. Just the dull hum of your pulse slowing.

"I went to Kazdel recently," she started, voice soft, like she was telling a story by a fire, not watching your life drain out. "Didn't stay long. The food's better in Victoria anyway. Spicier in Lungmen, though. There's this one place—whole-in-the-wall kinda deal, run by this old couple—makes dumplings with chili oil that'd make you weep."

She chuckled to herself. "Bet you would've loved it. You always complained about rations."

You blinked slowly, your gaze turning glassy. Her features blurred at the edges, like you were looking at her through dirty water.

"I saw a coastline last week," she continued. "Just west of Rim Billiton. The whole thing lit up at dusk—fireflies, or maybe some kind of weird Anaty lanternfly. Hundreds of them, all at once, like the ocean was breathing light. Thought about taking a picture for you, but it wouldn't have come out right."

Mostima fell silent for a while, only the faint wind shifting debris filling the space between you. Then she stood slowly, her knees creaking with dried blood and fatigue.

"I wish I had more time to tell you the rest," she said, brushing her coat off and grimacing at the gore smeared across the fabric. "But we're on the clock. And this jacket's a mess."

You tried to say something. Your lips parted, your throat worked. A weak cough rattled in your chest, spattering more blood down your chin. The taste of iron never left now. Your breaths were shallow and wet, dragging thin wheezes from a chest that barely rose anymore.

Mostima stepped back, running gloved fingers through her tangled hair before a sudden chime buzzed from her comms unit. She flicked it on with a small motion, expression shifting immediately into that casual, breezy calm.

"Yo! Mostima here," she answered cheerily. "Yeah, no, I'm fine. The place is wrecked though—lotta damage. No survivors."

She paused, listening. Her eyes flicked once in your direction.

"Yeah. That includes them. Mm-hmm. Got their gear. You can send the cleanup crew, I'll meet you back at the perimeter."

Click.

She knelt and started gathering up your scattered belongings. The fancy tech—the prototype scanner you'd been field testing, your encrypted tablet, your bag with all the tags and mission reports. She packed it all up efficiently, carefully, without urgency. Then she walked over to you again.

"Can't really let all this go to waste," she said with a soft shrug, slipping the bag over her shoulder.

You tried to move. Your fingers twitched. You couldn't even lift your head.

Mostima looked down at you, her eyes calm, detached now. No sorrow. No more warmth.

Her hand reached for your neck.

The cold brush of her fingers against your throat was brief—she unclipped your dog tag with a single tug. The metal was streaked with blood when she raised it up, dangling from the chain.

"You always hated wearing this," she said lightly. "Kept trying to leave it in your locker. Guess now you don't have to worry about that."

She pocketed it. Took one last look at you.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Really. I liked you."

She adjusted her coat, standing to full height. "But it's dangerous work. You know how it is. Being a Rhodes Island operator? Package doesn't always get delivered."

She turned.

You panicked. Your lungs seized with the effort of trying to speak.

"...M...Mo...sti…"

Your voice came out cracked, barely a breath. You clawed at the ground, tried to push yourself up. Your limbs were leaden. Broken. There was nothing left to lift. You were still pinned by the debris, body trembling weakly beneath it.

"...Wait…"

She didn't stop.

You couldn’t see her face anymore. Just the sway of her jacket, the blood-drenched back of it, as she walked slowly away across the ruined field.

Your throat caught another ragged breath.

"Please…"

Just before she disappeared into the haze of smoke and falling ash, Mostima turned.

And smiled.

That same smile she always wore—calm, crooked, like nothing ever touched her.

"Sleep tight," she said gently. "It’ll all stop hurting soon."

And then she was gone. Her footsteps faded beneath the wind and the shifting rubble.

You lay there, barely breathing.

The wreckage grew cold around you. The sky above flickered with red and dust.

And you were alone.

End Notes

https://discord.gg/XqJzJ6ByTz

Eto bleh

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